



‘GENDER – CLASS – DYNAMIC’ & ‘COMRADES, BUT WOMEN’

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GENDER – CLASS – DYNAMIC

It's immediately apparent that all societies hinge on a twofold distinction: between genders and between classes.

That this pairing of distinctions organizes all such societies is not fortuitous: the concept of surplus labor unifies (links) the twofold distinction. In all modes of production up to now, labor, that is, population increase, is the principal productive force (and will remain so for as long as something can be called a productive force). Gender and class distinctions are assumed in the concept of surplus labor (all this was developed in the first chapter of our text [see TC 23]).

The capitalist mode of production is the first mode of production to have a problem with labor and the growth of the population. Other modes of production had problems with population growth, but they were episodic problems of regulation and not the specific question of a dynamic. No mode of production prior to capitalism had a dynamic of creating the labor that's *necessary for its abolition*. The gender distinction in these previous modes of production may be (extremely) unsatisfactory, but it is not a contradiction because it defines for every individual the *inherent conditions of their individuality*.

For surplus labor to become the locus of a double contradiction, it is necessary, certainly, to have the distinction between worker and non-worker as a contradiction (something found in all modes of production), but it is also necessary for there to be a contradictory dynamic between surplus and necessary labor, which is only brought in by the capitalist mode of production. This contradictory dynamic, which is the contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, changes the distinction of genders from something inherent in the individual into something with a contingent and problematic status. The contradiction appeared at the very core of the distinction (concerning the ‘inherent condition of individuality’ and a ‘contradiction which appeared’, cf. *The German Ideology*). This contradiction contains within itself both the condition and the modalities of its expression (its discourse, its practice): the contingency of social definitions for every individual, their abstraction, their universality/singularity. A contingency of the definition of class, a contingency of the definition of gender. There are no longer any objective individuals (cf. *Formen...*). Crucially, however, the contingency itself is not contingent but structural, definitive of the definition of individuals; it is necessary. This contingency does not refer back to an individual, to a person who might or might not belong to a class or a gender. The contingency itself cannot not be.

These contingencies of gender distinction and class definition have an identical *raison d'être* (“*raison d'être*” is not synonymous with “content”: the *raison d'être* in Hegel is the *ground* [*fondement*]; that is, the reflexivity of the essence of a particular [*particulier*] in its other; this other is its *raison d'être* insofar as the singularity is defined by the difference between it and its relational other: so this other is its *raison d'être*).

This identical *raison d'être* (of the gender distinction and the class distinction) is the contradiction of surplus and necessary labor which establishes (mediates the one through the other) the contingency of the gender definition and the class definition alike (labor as principal productive force; increase of the population). *At this level we cannot yet say that the contingency of the class relation is the dynamic of the gender relation.* In fact, on this point, the two are so indissociable that to use one for defining the other is impossible without being tautological. It's a matter of teasing them apart.

Surplus labor is the substance and the concept of both distinctions; the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor is the concept of their contingency. It is the setting in motion of this contradiction which, in the capitalist mode of production (the only mode of production where this contradiction exists), dissociates the double distinction of class and gender. This contradiction (surplus/necessary labor) is a moving contradiction, it contains within itself, as contradiction, the necessity and the capability of its own reproduction.

Wage labor is the mediation between the pure subjectivity of labor (the non-objectivity of the worker in the capitalist mode of production; the situation of no reserves) and the condition and means of labor as objectivity. Wage labor is the abolition of the separation within the separation, the abolition of the contingency within the contingency. But the movement has an *essential condition*: the existence and reproduction of gender differences, and in two senses.

First of all, by definition wage labor includes the creation, differentiation, and hierarchy of public and private spheres,

of production and reproduction. The reproduction of labor power is the private matter of the workers. Impervious to its productive aspect, it includes the reproduction of the corps of workers, the control [*arraisonnement*] of women and their privatization (women as private property/women relegated to the private sphere). Wage labor presupposes reproduction as a private matter for the race of workers and the singular appropriation of women – that is, each male gets his own. This appropriation defines them within the private sphere. By defining gender under the concept of surplus labor with the population as the main productive force, the female gender is consigned to reproduction. From this point of view the corps of wage-earners is masculine (we will need to return to the significance of women's participation in wage labor from the beginning of capitalism).

Secondly, the movement of the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor, as a contradiction in process, entails the suppression of the contingency of gender differentiation. In the moving contradiction, this contingency exists in order not to exist: work as exploitable matter creates a distinction of genders, and as such is the concealed basis of the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor. It's the relative value of the relation between surplus and necessary labor which is at stake (one more or one less) and not the absolute value (no plus or minus sign) of this relation: work as productive force and exploitable matter. Hence this movement presupposes the naturalization of the gender distinction. From this viewpoint, the contradiction in process has the distinction of genders as a precondition.

It follows from the setting in motion of the contradiction and from these two points that the distinction of classes and the class struggle do not of themselves give rise to the gender distinction as a contingent phenomenon (as a contradictory appearance, that is, an unfortunate or unhappy individuality). Not only is this movement predicated on the existence of the gender distinction, but also on its naturalization, the disappearance of its contingency (in the West, it was in the 16th century that the gender relation came to be naturalized as an individual essence instead of a set of behaviors. The objective individual does not need to be naturalized; he is always already defined. What characterizes him and distinguishes him is not an essence but his behaviors. Naturalization, for its part, is the complement of abstraction and universality).

The gender relation is a contradiction between men and women. As such, this contradiction is *in* the class struggle *against* the class struggle. In a society of classes, the gender distinction is constantly obscured as a social phenomenon; it is the presupposition that class society naturalizes. The contradiction between men and women ensures its existence in the class struggle against itself, more precisely against their conflictual reproduction. The proletarian (man) who struggles as such against capital reproduces in his proletarian struggle the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women. If it can be said that the dynamic of the gender distinction is the contingency of the class relation, this is only insofar as it is *directly* what it is: a contradiction between men and women only where the contingency of class affiliation exists.

The hierarchical and contradictory gender distinction is the contingency of class affiliation; the latter does not exist else-

where (an equality is always reversible, but always has a way of declaring itself where it is most expressive). The contingency of class affiliation that exists in the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor is rooted in the very fact that labor is the main productive force. With the gender distinction, it is labor as productive force and exploitable material that is at stake in the contradiction – that is, to put it bluntly, the appropriation of women by all men (wage-earners and capitalists). At issue is the very relation which is included as such, as labor, between surplus and necessary labor and not the movement of this contradiction as a contradiction in process. What counts is not the position of the cursor but the object to which the cursor is applied and without which the cursor would not exist.

In the course of history, the contradiction between men and women receives its admission ticket from the class struggle: the English Revolution, 1789, 1830, 1848, turn-of-the-century anarchism, the period after 1968 (according to Joan Scott [*Only Paradoxes to Offer*], the history of feminism seems like an illusion). A certain pressure is needed in the class struggle (the term “pressure” is vague and is used here only evocatively – the criteria would have to be defined) for the naturalization of the gender distinction that the class struggle presupposes no longer to be taken for granted (this “no longer taken for granted” is a criterion of the pressure). But then, in that event, the specific dynamic of the gender distinction appears to buck the course of the class struggle, as “radical” and “violent” as it may be. And the matter does not end there.

The class struggle is a game that would always have the same winner were it not for the fact that it brings about the aboli-

tion of its own rules (cf. *TC 20* and the summary: “De la contradiction entre le prolétariat et le capital à la production du communisme”): exploitation is a contradiction for itself. “It is the object as a totality, the capitalist mode of production, which is in contradiction with itself in the contradiction of its elements because the contradiction with the other is for each element a self-contradiction, in that the other is *its* other.”

But the content and resolution of this self-contradiction as a contradiction between classes is the troubling emergence of the gender distinction and of the contradiction between men and women. The contradiction arrives at the heart of the class struggle, as an imposing and, above all, specific presence.

Paola Tabet (*L’Arraisionnement des femmes*) shows that “reproduction is the ground on which the social relations of sex are based.” It is the ground, the substance and the dynamic of the contradiction between men and women which can develop as such, for itself, along with the capitalist mode of production. Its dynamic, in the sphere of reproduction, is labor in the capitalist mode of production (always necessary, always excessive). The contradiction between men and women cannot be folded into the class struggle, but the conjunction of the two is not fortuitous, either theoretically or as a set of historical events.

In its contradiction with capital, the proletariat is in contradiction with itself and this self-contradiction can even be manifested in its struggles, in its action as a class, that is, as a lag [*écart*] within the limit (acting as a class). But in the course of the class struggles, the contradiction between men and women is what enables the boundary to be crossed, be-

cause its specific ground is reproduction (along with everything that this ground comprises: essentially the separation between public and private, which is necessarily challenged) so that it's no longer simply a question of struggle between classes but of their very existence when what appears is labor itself as productive force, and the appearance of labor as productive force establishes the contingency of class designation. Popular revolutions (the English Revolution, the French Revolution, the dual-tendency revolutions [Marx: *the New Rhenish Gazette*; Trotsky: *Permanent Revolution*; Guerin: *Les Luttes de classes sous la Première République*] or workers' revolutions have always marked a return to limits by putting women back "in their place".

This conjunction is not fortuitous for the reasons we have given, but neither is it necessary, for the same reasons. The contradiction between men and women needs to assert itself in and especially against the class struggle (the reflexive game of struggling classes). The proletariat must find a way, in its struggle as a class (limit), against capital, to call itself back into question, in order for this contradiction between men and women to affect it. Which is to say, in order for the conjunction to be meaningful for both contradictions in question. That is what struggles must be about.

Yet a struggle of women, even with ordinary demands which are themselves not particularly "feminine" (wages, working conditions, layoffs...) is never *just* a struggle or a strike, but always a struggle or a strike *by women*. In fact, the contradiction between men and women is never absent, whether it is addressed as such or just present in the themes. All women's movements bring to the table (or just make apparent) the

question of the separation of the private and public spheres (to challenge their separation is to challenge their very existence, which is nothing if not separate) constituting the wage relation; the question of subsistence, of solidarity and of unproductive-reproductive labor, that is to say, the organization of life despite exchange; the question of sexuality (an ostensible public appearance is always attached to a deviant sexuality); and finally the pleasure of being together not only as female workers or employees, but as women.

Even the participation of wives, companions, mothers, sisters, etc. in (male) workers' struggles radically changes the content and the scope of these struggles (the long English miners strike is not understandable without this factor).

In their own struggles or in that of male workers, when women intervene, even in the direct expression of ordinary demands, a different dimension, something other than the reflexive game between the classes, always appears.

COMRADES, BUT WOMEN

Revolution as abolition of class and gender raises certain questions and problems pertaining to the link between class struggle and the struggle of women. One of the problems posed for us is that the departure point for this text, which is situated within an ongoing project that has seen revisions and advances, is the necessity of gender abolition in revolution understood as ommunisation. Thus one is led to explore the question of the articulation between class struggles and the women's struggles, between capitalist exploitation and masculine domination, between feminism and programmatism... Hence the departure point for this text is not situated in current struggles or in the structure of the relation as it is manifest therein.

Now, if one submits that the abolition of genders will be a revolution in the revolution, this presupposes a particular dynamic that is not subsumed by that of the class struggle even when the latter turns against itself. Moreover, if one speaks of the particular dynamic in the course of the revolution, already there is today particular dynamic of the gender relation which is not reduced to the class relation. To say particular dynamic is to say specific contradiction, for a simple relation of antagonism doesn't contain any dynamic. Thus it is about the possibility of thinking a revolution in the revolution, a contradiction in the contradiction. But it is problematic to include one

element only within another element. The traps and the difficulties are legion. We can see this in the recent history of the relations between feminism and programmatism. Indeed, in the programmatic context, there are roughly two possibilities for women who confront this question in struggle or in theory:

- If the women posit their exploitation as an articulation of the class struggle, the gender relation disappears in both practice and theory. In other words, the category “woman” is absorbed and rendered invisible by the class struggle. This approach has the pretense of addressing the question, but it does so only in order to make it disappear (this is one of the dead-ends of the “class struggle” tendency within feminism).
- If women who pose this question are forced, in order to avoid the first solution we have just described, to posit the existence of a specific mode of exploitation independent of the capitalist relation of exploitation, they do so in order to enable advances within the specific categories and processes of the gender relation. This is the contribution of the “revolutionary Feminists” who built the concept of domestic labor and who speak of the abolition of men and women. This contribution is the basis on which we were able to undertake this work. However, and despite what is at stake, we are aware that it is difficult and artificial to maintain a segregation, to think the category woman and the category proletariat as independent, for in real life one is of course simultaneously both.

If the question of the dynamic is posed, it is because in certain present struggles where women pose the question of the

gender relation we already see that they must then confront their male comrades during the struggle, as for example in the piquetero movement in Argentina. In August 2005 the *Movimiento de mujeres desocupadas* (MMD) from Tartagal was created, and these women wanted to struggle “alone” because “even if they were the majority in the piquetero organizations, they were not the majority in the ruling bodies of these organizations” (Bruno Astarian, “Le mouvement des piqueteros – Argentine 1994–2006,” *Échanges* pamphlet). Bruno Astarian adds “And when the gains of the movement were divided up, the women were probably wronged.” However, he concludes: “For the time being, this is all we know about the MMD of Tartagal. But one doesn’t need to know more in order to understand that its creation marks a recoil in the general movement. The separation of the struggle of the unemployed women from that of the unemployed men, as any separation grounded on race, age, nationality, etc., goes against the abolition of the categories of the capitalist society, categories that we have seen undermined in more intense phases of struggle.” (*ibid.*)

We don’t know what kind of role or place the groups of women could obtain at the heart of these struggles, but a critique which views their appearance to be a simple sign of recoil and of the division of the movement, just like “nationality” would be understood, is nothing but an echo of the classical programmatic idea.

We deduce, therefore, that within the gender relation and the situation of women, there is something which objects to the class struggle and which has a very concrete effect: when women fight, whether in the private or public sphere, when they attack the very existence of those spheres which is con-

stituted by their separation into public and private, they must confront their male comrades, insofar as they are men *and* insofar as they are their comrades. And they (the women) are the men's comrades, but women.

Finally, once we have taken all this in, the importance of specifying the particular dynamic of the gender relation is that we will then be able to think how and why the future ex-women – who alone pose by their acts the necessity of the abolition of gender, because of their place in the contradictory relation man/woman – will have to confront the future ex-men in the course of the revolution in order to overcome this division.

♥ *F*

LES PÉTROLEUSES WERE THE SEX WORKERS, WITCHES, AND LADY-PROLES OF
THE PARIS COMMUNE WHOSE 'LOVE OF RIOT' BURNT PARIS TO THE GROUND.

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